Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
New Series Volume 17 Number 1 January 2020

FIELD TRIP-1: Sunday, 12th January 2020: Narsapur Reserve Forest. Meeting point: Opp. Mangatrai Pearls, Punjagutta, 6.15AM. Trip Coordinator: Dr Krishna Nagarajan (Mobile: 8886875212)

Always a dependable birding location, the beauty and bird richness of the verdant Narsapur Forest would be much-enhanced in the winter season.

FIELD TRIP-2: Sunday, 19th January 2020: Manjeera WLS. Meeting point: Opp. Mangatrai Pearls, Punjagutta, 6.15AM. Trip Coordinator: Sudhir Moorti (Mobile: 9652283335)

The Manjeera WLS, located in Medak District, is a freshwater ecosystem with a riverine habitat that supports mugger crocodiles. It is also a good birding site.

Both the Field Trips would be half-day trips. Carry water and breakfast. As always, we will be car-pooling, so please let the respective coordinators know if you need a ride, and also if you can accommodate any others in your vehicle. Members are requested to wear their Deccan Birders ID cards. Non-members are most welcome; however, they are requested to contribute Rs. 100/- per person to the Deccan Birders kitty. Our new T-Shirts and Caps will be available for sale; T-Shirts are Rs. 450/- each and Caps are Rs. 250/-. Also, as always, please avoid plastic carry bags and containers.

INDOOR MEETING: Talk on "Thinking ecologically about India's cities" by Dr Harini Nagendra. Friday, 24th January 2020, 6.00PM: MJCET Seminar Hall, Block 4, Mufakkam Jah College of Engineering and Technology (MJCET), Raod No 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034.

Dr Harini Nagendra is Professor of Sustainability at the Azim Premji University. She has conducted research for over 25 years on India's forests and cities, examining conservation from the perspective of ecology and social justice. An accomplished author, her books include 'Nature in the City: Bengaluru in the Past, Present and Future' and 'Cities and Canopies: The Tree Book of Indian Cities'. Do make it a point to attend this interesting talk, which is being co-hosted by World Wildlife Fund and Sultan-Ul-Uloom Education Society.

HSBC Hyderabad BirdRace 2020

We are happy to announce the 11th edition of the Hyderabad Bird Race, an annual winter event where bird lovers form teams and involve in a dawn to dusk frenzy of spotting and recording bird species in and around the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad. The Bird Race culminates at the end of the day in a grand dinner followed by awarding the participant teams mementos and listening to their birding experiences. The gathering at the end of the day provides an excellent opportunity for interaction with some of the renowned experts in the field as well. Do participate in big numbers. Please note: the event is open to non-members also, so please bring your children, friends, colleagues, or anyone else whom you would like to introduce to the world of birding!

For further clarifications, please contact Srikanth Bhamidipati on 9738840070.

WHAT COLOUR DO YOU WANT?

Trip Report – Narsapur, January 12, 2020

Text: Sheetal Vyas; Photos: Satish Grama

Laughing Dove

Trips to Narsapur Forest have always been a very pleasant and exciting birding experience. It was here, after all, that we had once seen the Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher, and where the elusive Eurasian Wryneck was spotted. So I asked long time birding pal Arjun Surendra if he'd join me on the jaunt and happily, he managed to fulfil fatherly duties to his three-month-old son and get away for a morning in the sun.

The group of nearly 25, led by Dr Krishna Nagarajan, joined up at the main gate of the Air Force Station at Dundigal.

We took the forest to the south of the main road, and even as we parked, had an auspicious start with a couple of Small Minivets, a Plain Prinia and an Indian Grey Hornbill. We trooped in, and came across a pair of Chestnut-shouldered Petronias, and in a picturesque spot, framed with fronds, a Common Iora and a Tickell's Blue Flycatcher.

Already there was a menacing thrum of earth movers in the distance. We prepared to shrug it off and move into the thickets – but alas, came upon a large swathe of forest cleared and the earth being prepared for what seemed like a road! We stood around dismayed as Sathvik Reddy darted to a point where he remembered seeing a Nightjar on a previous visit.

Shaking our heads, we pushed on into the jungle on the side and flushed a dark-coloured bird that may or may not have been a Nightjar.

Part of the group

We arrived shortly at a newly constructed two-storied *machan*. It was a charming place, breezy and affording a beautiful vantage to the forests around. We brought out the food and turned our binoculars all around. Our reward – apart from the Babblers, Drongos and Cisticolas – was a few gorgeous Plum-headed Parakeets. About half a dozen of these chattered and screeched companionably at each other, and we got a close, leisurely look at their plumage... the deep pink of their heads glowing in the sun, the sharp line of the collar followed by a cyan blush tapering off into an indeterminate yellow and eventually a rich green of the body.

Plum-headed Parakeet

Once again, I pondered on the joys of quality birding. New discoveries are exciting, of course, but I would rather a good look at a familiar bird over a tick against a new species, fleetingly seen.

All in all, an excellent winter morning, and Narsapur was as exciting as it always promises to be.

The complete list of birds seen during the trip is given below:

Sl. No.	Species Name	Sl. No.	Species Name	Sl. No.	Species Name
1	Greenish Warbler	17	Common Tailorbird	33	Grey Heron
2	Plain Prinia	18	White-browed Bulbul	34	Common Sandpiper
3	Ashy Prinia	19	Red-vented Bulbul	35	Common Snipe
4	Common Iora	20	White-browed Wagtail	36	Paddyfield Pipit
5	Plum-headed Parakeet	21	Citrine Wagtail	37	Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark
6	Chestnut-shouldered Petronia	22	Zitting Cisticola	38	Brahminy Kite
7	Small Minivet	23	Ashy Woodswallow	39	Pied Bushchat
8	Black Drongo	24	Green Bee-eater	40	Great Cormorant
9	Ashy Drongo	25	Laughing Dove	41	Common Kingfisher
10	Indian Golden Oriole	26	Spotted Dove	42	Oriental White-eye
11	Crested Hawk Eagle	27	Garganey	43	Little Egret
12	Red Avadavat	28	Lesser Whistling-duck	44	Great Egret
13	Indian Robin	29	Cotton Pygmy-goose	45	Jungle Babbler
14	Oriental Magpie Robin	30	Common Coot	46	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher
15	Coppersmith Barbet	31	Purple Swamphen	47	Indian Grey Hornbill
16	Common Myna	32	Little Cormorant		

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IT'S A MONDAY AND I AM NOT A ROBOT!
Trip Report: Osman Sagar, January 2020

Text and photos: Srikanth Bhamidipati

Short-toed Snake Eagle

It was a regular Monday. When I saw everyone getting ready to rush to their work and back to the usual robotic lifestyle, I decided that it was time for me to break the stereotype – I said to myself, "It's a Monday and I am not a Robot", and decided instead to visit my favourite birding place in Hyderabad, Osman Sagar. While everyone was in a hurry, I was laid back and reached this amazing place around 7:30AM.

Driving past the entry point, I was greeted by the usual Chats, Robins and some Strawberries (Finches, I mean!). It was a quiet morning out there as I drove around the lake, looking for the magnificent raptors which have been attracting a lot of people to that location lately.

During this time, I spotted the fastest diving bird on the planet, the Peregrine, and then another winter visitor to this location, the Common Kestrel. The Peregrine gave a very short time this day unlike the previous visits, but as usual the Kestrel was ready to pose. This Kestrel, instead of sitting on a rock or on the ground, or fly away, decided to hunt a grasshopper right next to me! That's when I was able to click a nice diving shot.

Common Kestrel

After that, I continued driving, with an escort of Swallows following me.

Barn Swallow

After some time, I decided to get off the car and pay a visit to the water birds which have come from various locations. For the past few years I have been seeing the Sand Plovers being regular visitors to this site, accompanied by others like Stints, Sandpipers, Stilts and other Plovers. This time, there was a total wader population of around 250-300.

A lot of ducks were seen this time compared to my previous visits, with Bar-headed Geese leading in numbers; along with them there were a lot of Whistling-ducks, Shelducks, Cotton Pygmy-goose, Red-crested Pochards and others.

It was, as usual, a great sight to watch the Flamingos, but the presence of Spoonbills, Pelicans and other Storks made the wetland look much beautiful.

Eurasian Spoonbill

Another interesting sighting nearby was the Indian Courser.

Indian Courser

Osman Sagar is a perfect habitat for bird population to survive, as it provides all the necessary elements required for their survival. However, there has been a systematic change in the habitat, wherein trees have been cut down and the natural protection for these birds has been lost. In general, the land is currently used for the below reasons:

- Agriculture
- Livestock grazing
- Drinking water source
- Fishing

Additionally, there are many threats to this lovely habitat like:

- Tourist and Recreational Activities
- Plastic & Waste disbursal
- Grazing
- Encroachment or settlement
- Forest fires
- Agricultural activities

Spotted Owlet

As mentioned earlier, this place is a heaven for Raptors. On this day, I sighted around 9 Raptors and 2 Owls (1 Owl and 1 Owlet).

It is the abundance of food, good source of water and good places to protect themselves, that has resulted in our sighting a lot of birds of prey here over the past few years. In total this day, I saw about 75 species – which was infinitely more comforting than being a Robot for a day!

Paddyfield Pipit

Pallid Harrier

The complete list of birds seen is given below:

Sl No	Species Name	Sl No	Species Name	Sl No	Species Name
1	Bar-headed Goose	26	Green Sandpiper	51	Black Kite
2	Ruddy Shelduck	27	Wood Sandpiper	52	White-throated Kingfisher
3	Cotton Pygmy-goose	28	Indian Courser	53	Green Bee-eater
4	Garganey	29	River Tern	54	Blue-tailed Bee-eater
5	Common Pochard	30	Asian Openbill	55	Peregrine Falcon
6	Red-crested Pochard	31	Painted Stork	56	Eurasian Kestrel
7	Indian Spot-billed Duck	32	Little Cormorant	57	Black Drongo
8	Northern Pintail	33	Great Cormorant	58	Rufous-tailed Lark
9	Green-winged Teal	34	Spot-billed Pelican	59	Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark
10	Indian Peafowl	35	Gray Heron	60	Oriental Skylark
11	Gray Francolin	36	Intermediate Egret	61	Tawny Lark
12	Greater Flamingo	37	Cattle Egret	62	Ashy Prinia
13	Little Grebe	38	Indian Pond Heron	63	Zitting Cisticola
14	Rock Pigeon	39	Glossy Ibis	64	Barn Swallow
15	Eurasian Collared-Dove	40	Black-headed Ibis	65	Red-vented Bulbul
16	Spotted Dove	41	Red-naped Ibis	66	Asian Pied Starling
17	Laughing Dove	42	Spotted Owlet	67	Common Myna
18	Asian Koel	43	Short-eared Owl	68	Indian Robin
19	Common Hawk Cuckoo	44	Eurasian Spoonbill	69	Siberian Stonechat
20	Black-winged Stilt	45	Black-winged Kite	70	Pied Bushchat
21	Red-wattled Lapwing	46	Short-toed Snake Eagle	71	Purple Sunbird
22	Lesser Sand Plover	47	Booted Eagle	72	Indian Silverbill
23	Kentish Plover	48	Pallid Harrier	73	Red Avadavat
24	Little Ringed Plover	49	Montagu's Harrier	74	Paddyfield Pipit
25	Little Stint	50	Shikra		

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Report: Leucistic Rosy Starling in Nizampet, January 2020

Text and photo: YSRK Prasad

Leucistic Rosy Starling

Birding is a delightful activity and the feeling of being a birdwatcher heightens up when we see something unusual. An unusual sighting for a birdwatcher could include sighting a rare species, sighting a bird that has not been recorded in a particular area though not rare, sighting a bird with a band, or observing an interesting behaviour you have never seen before. So the sudden appearance of a bird with unusual coloration on its body is sure to call an observer's attention and lead to some exciting moments. I had a similar experience when I saw a leucistic Rosy Starling, which is a rare phenomenon, though relatively more common than albinism.

Even though there has been a sudden spurt in the construction activity at Nizam Talab vicinity, leading to loss of habitat, the area has many Acacia trees that provide a home to many species of birds. Every year, I see a flock of not less than 150-200 Rosy Starlings in the area.

On January 8, 2020, I observed a flock of some 50 Rosy Starlings (*Pastor roseus*), while birding in the evening at Nizampet Road in Telangana. The flock of Starlings was found perching on the Acacia tree, a few feet away from the Nizam Talab. One particular individual looked different – the faint wash on its feathers confused me.

Initially, Albinism flashed through my mind, looking at the pale colour of the bird at first glance. Albinism refers to the complete absence of melanin. The eye colour, along with the plumage, determines if a bird is albino or leucistic: Albino birds have completely white plumage, with pink eyes and skin, whereas the eyes of leucistic birds are darker coloured, as they still have pigment in their eyes. The colour of eyes, bill, legs, and bare parts in leucistic birds are normal. Leucism is less rare than Albinism.

A careful look at the photographs and some quick research helped me understand the bird as leucistic. The feathers looked faded, but the eyes and bill were dark. The bird, in this case, was not alone, and looked lighter in comparison. There was an acceptance from the rest of the birds; however, the bird looked quite different from the others and that could make it vulnerable to predators.

> *Bird Leucism: Is a genetic mutation that results in a total or partial reduction of color in a bird's plumage. The reduction of color in the bird's plumage is due to an inadequate deposition or fixation of pigments only in the bird's feathers. Other parts of the bird's body have normal coloration. Source: www.avianreport.com*

Leucistic birds face several challenges in the wild. Flashy plumage reduces the bird's protective camouflage and makes it more susceptible to predation. Plumage colour plays a key role in courtship displays, so in some species of birds where plumage colour is important in attracting mates, Leucistic birds find it difficult or even impossible to find a mate, and may lose breeding opportunities.

Following are some interesting facts about Leucistic birds:

- A bird with Leucism may pass it down to their offspring, meaning Leucism is hereditary.
- Leucism affects only feathers with melanin pigment, usually dark feathers. However, some Leucistic birds can lose all the pigment in their feathers. Such birds' feathers appear completely white.
- Project FeederWatch, an online database of bird species observed and reported by citizen scientists, has recorded only about 1,600 Leucistic birds of any species out of 5.5 million distinct birds reported.
- Environmental hazards show an impact on Leucism and Albinism. The Chernobyl disaster that occurred on April 26, 1986, exposed wild birds to massive radiation. Follow-up studies with an experimental group of Barn Swallows near Chernobyl showed up to a ten-fold increase in Leucism and Albinism over control groups of Barn Swallows in places such as Italy.

Reference: https://www.avianreport.com/bird-leucism

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Bird of the Month

Text and Photo: Umesh Mani

Yellow-billed Babbler (*Turdoides affinis*)

Yellow-billed Babbler (Chennai, November 2, 2019)

Order: Passeriformes
Family: Leiothrichidae
Genus: *Turdoides*
Species: *T. affinis*
Size: 23 cm

Description & distribution: The Yellow-billed Babbler is a common resident breeding bird, endemic to its range of Southern India and Sri Lanka. It has greyish-brown upperparts, a grey head and nape, and bluish-white eyes. The nominate race of Southern India has a whitish crown and nape with a darker mantle and ear coverts, while the Sri Lankan race, *T. a. taprobanus*, as also birds of the nominate race seen towards extreme Southern India, has a darker grey crown and back. The rump is paler and the tail has a broad, dark tip. Throat and breast are mottled grey and fairly heavily streaked, and the belly is a pale buff. Individuals of the Sri Lankan race are very similar to, and often confused with, the Jungle Babbler (*T. striatus*), which does not actually occur in Sri Lanka, and with the Orange-billed Babbler (*T. rufescens*). The Yellow-billed Babbler was earlier also known as White-headed Babbler, but that name is now used for the African species, *T. leucocephala*. The sexes are alike.

The Yellow-billed Babbler is found in Southern India (including Andhra Pradesh south of the Godavari, Telangana, Karnataka south of Belgaum, Tamil Nadu and Kerala) and Sri Lanka.

Habitat & behaviour: The Yellow-billed Babbler is gregarious and usually seen in small groups of 7-10 birds – due to which tendency groups are often referred to colloquially as 'seven sisters' – in gardens, orchards, village greens, and especially dense scrub like Lantana. It prefers lower altitudes and drier habitats than the Jungle Babbler. Though the Yellow-billed Babbler does sometimes go up to the lower reaches of trees, groups are usually seen foraging on the ground, while one member perches high up and acts as a look-out. Its diet primarily consists of insects and vegetable matter, including fruit, nectar and human food scrap, though it occasionally also eats other small animals like garden lizards, scorpions, grasshoppers etc. It has short rounded wings, and its flight is weak; it does not fly long distances, and gains height by climbing up a tree or tall bush before taking off. Its call is a musical trilling *tri ri ri*, pitched higher than the Jungle Babbler, and its presence is often announced by the loud, continual chirping, squeaking and chattering of birds in the group. They roost communally, with several birds lining up next to each other; juveniles often wedge themselves in the middle of such line-ups. Mornings are generally spent foraging, while the afternoons are usually less active hours, with birds indulging in resting, allopreening, or bathing during the afternoon.

Nesting: The Yellow-billed Babbler breeds almost around the year, but breeding activity generally peaks during March-June and October-November. The nest is an open, messy cup of twigs and roots, built in dense masses of foliage and placed in a fork of a branch, generally within around 4m from the ground. The usual clutch consists of 2-5 turquoise blue eggs. Both male and female share parental duties; however, other adult birds of the flock also feed the young, and communal nest-building, feeding and rearing of young is common. Brood-parasiting has been noted by the Pied Crested Cuckoo and the Common Hawk Cuckoo.

Local name: The Yellow-billed Babbler is known as *'Chinna sida'* or *'Chinda sida'* in Telugu, *'Kariyilakili'* in Malayalam, and '*Thavittu kuruvi', 'Pandri kuruvi,* or *'Velaikkara kuruvi'* in Tamil.

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For Private Circulation Only
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